



The Blessed Trinity and Life of the Soul

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By:
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Introduction

As I begin to write this booklet, I have somebody in mind. I do not know his name; I do not know whether he is rich or poor, learned or ignorant. Indeed, I do not know whether the character I imagine is a man or woman. Nor am I aware of that person's religious persuasion.

I see a person walking into a Catholic church. His eye (the masculine is used only for convenience) catches a display of booklets. It ranges up and down one column after another. A hand reaches out. It lifts one booklet from the case.

You, dear reader, may well be that person of my imaginings. You have picked up these lines. You have read to this word. You were detained by the title. Why? Of what interest is the mystery of the Blessed Trinity to you? Is it not something in which the theologians have loved to revel for centuries? Is it not too remote from life, too utterly unworldly, too highly mysterious to be the concern of a casual caller in a Catholic Church?

Am I presumptive in asking you to continue to read? Are you a believer in God? If so, you cannot say that the inner life of God does not concern you. Do you try to love God as well as to believe in Him? In that case, the more you know about His inner life, the more you will love Him, for you will discover there a limitless world of goodness, of truth and of beauty. You cannot know such things and fail to love them. My subject, the Blessed Trinity, might truly be paraphrased as "the inner life of God."

I shall have to search the Scriptures to discover what Christ has told us about it. Do not just pass over the pages that follow as being a string of unimportant texts, look up even the texts that are not quoted. Ponder each of them and try to draw from each the full meaning it is intended to convey.

Nor would I be justified in omitting altogether reference to what the speculative theologians have concluded about the inner life of God. As this is by no means a complete treatise, I must beg leave to impose limits on myself. Therefore, in the last few pages that I intend to write, I shall omit much of what I would dearly like to put down about the divine notions, circumincession, relations, appropriations, operations, and so on. I intend to

try to show you how we, you and I and the rest of men, are vitally concerned with this problem of God's inmost life, the mystery of the Three in One.

Our Faith

Since the second century, those who sought baptism in the Catholic Church have been instructed about the formula of doctrine we know as the Apostles' Creed. Baptism has always been administered, following Our Lord's command, "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." Therefore, the Creed is based on those words. Before baptism, the catechumen always had to make his profession of faith "in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; and in the Holy Ghost."

That oldest formula of the Church's belief in the Blessed Trinity has been repeated and amplified many times since. For example, Pope Dionysius (259—268) wrote a letter to his namesake, Bishop of Alexandria, condemning certain errors against orthodox belief in the Holy Trinity. The Nicene Creed, which is recited during Sunday Mass in all Catholic Churches, was drawn up at the Second Council of Constantinople in 381. It affirms the Godhead of the Son and the Holy Ghost.

The Athanasian Creed, which was composed by an unknown Latin author in the 5th or 6th century, summarizes in a most readable way the Church's teaching on the Incarnation and the Blessed Trinity.

The Doctrine

Every Catholic must believe that in God there are three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Each of the three Persons possesses numerically the same divine essence. This rather bold statement may be broken up into four parts:

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- (1) There is one divine Nature in which there are three Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.
 - (2) No one of these three Persons is either of the others. They are distinct—the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost is not the Father.
 - (3) Each Person is God—the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God.
 - (4) There are not three Gods but only one God.

The Trinity in the Old Testament

The Old Testament was, as we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the “shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things” (Heb. 10:1). Therefore, it is not surprising we find no clear statement of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Old Testament. There are indications of it however.

God used the plural when speaking of Himself—“Let us make man to our image and likeness” (Gen. 1:26). Certain passages (e.g.; Gen. 16:7-13, Exod. 3:2-14) have been thought to indicate a distinction in God between two Persons—One who sends and One who is sent.

The prophecies of the Messiahs distinguish God and the Son of God—“The Lord hath said to me: Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee” (Ps. 2:7; cf. Ps. 109:1-3 and 44:7; Is. 9:6 and 7:14).

Elsewhere, divine Wisdom is represented as a Hypostasis side by side with God, which has proceeded from God by birth from all eternity and cooperated in the creation of the world (cf. Prov. 8:22-31, especially verse 24; Wis. 7:22 and 8:8).

When the Old Testament refers to the “Spirit of God” or the “Holy Ghost” it does not mean a divine Person but a power that proceeds from God, that gives life, strength, illumination and impetus towards good. Thus, Gen. 1:2; Ps. 32:6, 103:30, and 138:7; Is. 61:1 and 63:10; Ezech. 11:5; Wis. 1:5-7.

The Trinity in the New Testament

“The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee,” said the angel to Our Lady (Luke 1:32-35). Although He named three Persons the Greek word used by Saint Luke for the Holy Ghost without the article, does not bring out clearly the personality of the Third Person. However, Saint Luke also wrote in Acts 1:8, “You shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you,” representing Him as a Person.

The accounts of Our Lord’s baptism represent Christ as the beloved and only Son of God and the Holy Spirit, side by side with the Father and the Son, as an independent, personal Essence. “He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and coming upon Him and, behold, a voice from heaven, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’ ” (Matt. 3:16).

Speaking to the Apostles after His Last Supper, Our Lord promised that the Father and He would send another Helper—the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Truth. The name *Paraclete* and His functions, to teach and witness, presuppose that He is a subsisting Person. “I will ask the Father and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you forever” (John 14:16, cf. also 14:26 and 15:26).

The clearest statement of the mystery of the Trinity is in Our Lord’s command to baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19). The singular “in the name” indicates that the three Persons have one essence. Father and Son are obviously Persons distinct in relationship and the Holy Ghost is completely coordinated to them, a Person, divine as they are.

Saint Peter began his first Epistle with a blessing invoking the Trinity. “According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, unto the sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ, Grace unto you” (1 Pet. 1:2).

Saint Paul ended his second Epistle to the Corinthians in the same way saying, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the charity of God and the communication of the Holy Ghost be with you all. Amen” (2 Cor. 13:13).

In Corinthians 12:4, Saint Paul taught that the three divine Person give three different kinds of gifts of the Spirit and in verse 11 lie appropriated the same gifts to the Spirit alone, thus indicating the substantial unity of the three Persons.

One of the most perfect expressions of the mystery is the famous “comma” of Saint John, 1 John 5:7. However, a decision of the Holy Office in 1927 taught that its genuineness can be doubted.

The Fatherhood of God

By virtue of creating all things, preserving them and governing them by His providence and elevating men to the state of grace and supernatural kinship with Himself, the Triune God is Father of all, but only in a derived or metaphorical sense.

In God, there is a true and strict fatherhood, the model of His derived and of all-created fatherhood. It belongs to the first Person only. It was in a unique and exclusive sense that Our Lord spoke of God as His Father. He said “My Father,” “Thy Father,” or “Your Father.” He never said, “Our Father.” He told His Apostles to pray, saying “Our Father,” but that was their prayer, not His. He made it clear that He and the Father were identical in essence and, thus, His sonship was to be understood in a proper physical sense. “No one knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither doth anyone know the Father, but the Son and he to whom it shall please the Son to reveal Him” (Matt. 11:27). “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). “For as the Father hath life in Himself, so He hath given to the Son also to have life in Himself” (John 5:26).

According to Saint John, Jesus is the Only Born Son of God—“We beheld His glory, glory as of the Only-begotten from the Father” (John 1:14). Four verses later—“God no man hath seen at any time; God only-begotten, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared him” (Westminster Version). Compare also John 3:16-18 and John 4.

Saint Paul argued, “Seeing that He hath not spared His own Son . . . how can He fail to grant us all things with Him?” (Rom. 8:32).

Saint John also relates that “the Jews sought the more to put Him to death because (He was) calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God” (John 5:18).

The Logos in Saint John

Saint John uses the Greek word “Logos” to designate the Son of God, which indicates a person and not merely an impersonal power of God or an attribute. “The Word was with God” (John 1:1) means that the Logos, the Word, was side by side with God, coordinated to God. That He is a Person is also clear from John 1:11-14. “His own received Him not . . . the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.”

The Word is not the same person as God the Father. He is with the Father, therefore distinct from Him. He is identified with the Father’s only-begotten Son. “We beheld His glory, glory as of the Only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

The Word is not only a Person distinct from the Father and identified with His only-begotten Son—but He is also a divine Person. “The Word was God” (John 1:1). Saint John tells us that He created the world—“All things were made through Him, and without Him was made nothing that hath been made.” He is eternal—“In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1-3). From Him the supernatural order takes its origin. He is the dispenser of truth and the life of grace—“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men; to as many as received Him He gave power to become children of God; we beheld His glory, full of grace and truth” (John 1:4, 12, and 14).

When we turn to Saint Paul and the author (who might also be Saint Paul) of the Epistle to the Hebrews, we find confirmation of our thesis. Heb. 1:2-3 speaks of God having in “these last days spoken to us by one who is His Son, whom He hath set up as heir of all things, by whom He created the ages. He, being the flashing-forth of His glory and the very expression of His being.” Christ, the Mediator of the New Testament, is as Son of God superior to the angels and to Moses, the mediators of the Old Covenant. As the rays of light stream forth from the Son, so the Son is “Light of Light.” Divine attributes

are ascribed to God the Son: by His power He keeps all things in existence; He effected mankind's purgation from sin; He sits at the right hand of God.

Elsewhere Saint Paul speaks of Christ as "the image of God" first-born of all creation (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15, 17, and 19) in whom "all things in heaven and on earth were created" and who "Himself is prior to all, and in Him all things hold together." "In Him it hath pleased the Father that all the fullness should dwell."

God the Holy Ghost

Many passages in Scripture prove that the Holy Ghost is a divine Person distinct from the Father and the Son.

That He is a *real* Person is proved from the baptismal formula (Matt. 28:19), the name Paraclete (advocate, defender, comforter, exhorter, interpreter, intercessor) which is also applied to Christ, a real Person, and because the Holy Ghost is said to do personal things. For example, He teaches truth, gives testimony for Christ, makes known the mysteries of God, tells the future and guides the election of bishops (cf. John 14:16; 16:13; and 15:26; 1 Cor. 2:10; John 16:13; Acts 21:11 and 20:28).

That He is a Person distinct from the Father and the Son is proved from the baptismal formula (Matt. 28:19); the sermon of Christ after the Last Supper in which the Holy Ghost is described as a Person who will be sent by the Father and the Son (John 14:16-26 and 15:26); and by His appearance on the occasion of Christ's baptism under the special symbol of the dove.

That He is a divine Person is proved because the name "Holy Ghost" is used alternatively with the name "God" (Acts 5:3; 1 Cor. 3:16 and 6:19 if.). In the baptismal formula, the Holy Ghost is made equal to the Father and the Son, who are truly God, and the Holy Ghost is given God's attributes. He has all knowledge, teaches all truth, foretells the future, inspired the Prophets, explores the deep things of God, and distributes grace (cf. John 16:13; 2 Pet. 1:21; Acts 1:16; 1 Cor. 2:10; 1 Cor. 12:10; John 12:10; John 3:5 and 20:22; Rom. 5:5; Gal. 4:6; 5:22).

That God is one in nature is a basic doctrine of Holy Scripture (Mark 12:29; 1 Cor. 8:4; Eph. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:5). The doctrine of the Blessed Trinity does not conflict with this in any way. The formula for baptism (Matt. 28:19) indicates that, although there are three distinct Persons, all three have the same nature. Our Lord did not say “in the names” (plural) but “in the name” (singular). The same is gathered from the texts that speak of the mutual co-inherence of the divine Persons. For example, “The Father is in me, and I in the Father” (John 10:38). See also John 14:9; 17:10; 16:13 if.; 5:19. In John 10:30 Christ clearly stated that His divine nature is one with that of His Father—“I and the Father are one.”

A Little Speculation

Person and Nature

Saint Thomas Aquinas defines person as “the distinct being, subsisting in an intellectual nature.” It is a whole. Nature (defined as “remote principle of operation”) is the basic part. Besides the nature, the person includes “individuating principles” that stem from matter, accidents, and individual existence, putting individual nature outside of its causes and in the world of reality. If this individuated and distinctly subsisting nature is rational, it is called a person.

In God, there are three Persons but only one nature. When John Smith is asked, “Who are you?” he replies, “I am John Smith.” However, if anybody were foolish enough to ask him “What are you?” he would have to reply, “I am a man.” Person answers the question “Who?” and nature answers the question “What?” Every being has a nature; but only rational beings are persons. You would not ask even the most intelligent pet dog “Who are you?”

Our nature makes us what we are. We act according to it. It is the source of what we can do. It decides what acts are possible for us. However, it does not do things. We do them. The person does them in virtue of his nature.

Amongst us humans, each person has one nature. He possesses it fully. We cannot even imagine that same one nature being fully possessed by Bill

Jones, John Brown, and Tom Smith. Yet God has told us that in Himself His one infinite Nature is totally possessed by three Persons. We must not doubt it. We are not in a position to do so, for we have no experience of an infinite nature. God's nature is infinite.

In God, the three Persons are distinct but not separate. They do not *share* the same divine nature—each Person wholly possesses it. These Persons are *distinct* because none of them is of the others. They are also not separate, for each is what He is because He possesses the one identical nature. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost each possesses the entire nature of God as His own.

Nature makes a being what it is. Therefore, each Person is wholly God and absolutely equal to the other two. Each Person can do all the things God can do. It is not merely that each Person possesses a nature equal and similar to that of the other two; each possesses wholly one and the same single nature. Therefore, although each is God, they are not three separate Gods. They are three distinct Persons but all one and the same God.

The Divine Procession of the Son

In God, knowledge and love are not only infinite because God is infinite; they are Himself.

We have seen that the New Testament refers to the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity as the *Son* and as the *Word*. In human life, a son receives from his father a nature like his father's, a man's nature. In God, the Second Person proceeds from the First and has a nature like His. The Father's nature is infinite; so is the Son's. Infinity means the full possession of the fullness of existence. Therefore, Father and Son each fully possesses the fullness of existence. In other words, they are wholly equal. Each is infinite.

In a human relationship, a father must exist before his son. Not so in God. He is infinite Being. He is all that He is in that one act of being. He is Father of His Son simply by being Himself. The Son, being equal to Him and infinite, is also eternal and equally necessary. It is not that the Father existed and then

made a decision to bring the Son into being. Father and Son are the same infinite Being by the same infinite necessity. The Second Person is equal in all things to the First.

Amongst ourselves, *word* means something we say with our vocal organs. God's Word cannot be that because He is a pure spirit. His word must be in the mind. It is a thought, an idea.

We are familiar with the opening of Saint John's Gospel where we read that God's Word was (a) in the beginning, (b) with God, (c) God Himself, (d) with the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.

Above, we said, God's knowledge is infinite and that it is Himself. Only the infinite, that is God Himself, can be the adequate object of infinite knowledge. God has revealed to us that He has begotten an idea of Himself. With us, an idea is the image, the mental double, of what we are thinking. The more of the object it expresses the more perfect it is. When the infinitely perfect God has an idea of Himself, that idea is perfect. It perfectly represents Himself. It is infinite and perfect like Himself, in no way less than Himself, and lacking nothing of Himself. Infinite Being cannot think of Himself inadequately. Everything in Him is also in His thought of Himself. The thought contains all the perfection of the Thinker. The Thought, the Idea, the Word that God generates is infinite, equal to Himself, an eternal living Person, God.

A thought has not a separate nature from him who thinks it; it is in the thinker's nature. Therefore, God's thought of Himself, His Word, is wholly in the one same divine nature. Because it is an adequate idea, it wholly contains the divine nature. Everything the Son has He has received from the Father; everything the Father has He has given to the Son. Each has the same divine nature in its fullness; the Father has it as unreceived, the Son has it as received. However, They are equal in all things.

The Divine Procession of the Holy Ghost

The Son proceeds from the Father by way of knowledge. The Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son by way of love. The First Person and

the Second love one another; just as the Father's knowledge of Himself begets the Word, equal to Himself, their act of loving means alt state of Lovingness within the Godhead. Father and Son pour themselves into it, all they are, all they have. This Lovingness is equal to themselves for it has all that they have. It is an infinite Person, God as they are God, the Holy Spirit or, in the traditional English term, the Holy Ghost.

Spirit is used here in the sense of movement of air or breathing. Our Lord breathed on the Apostles saying: Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (John 20:22). On the first Pentecost, "there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind" (Acts 2:2).

It is from the Father and the Son as one principle of love that the Holy Ghost proceeds. At Benediction, we sing, *Procedenti ab utroque* (to Him who proceeds from Both). In the Nicene Creed at Mass, we say, *Qui ex Patre Filioque procedit* (He who proceeds from the Father and the Son).

We never say that the Father and the Son *generate* the Holy Ghost. They breathe Him (*Spirate* is sometimes used. It is exact, but what an ugly word!). He is equal to them because they, Infinite Lovers, put themselves wholly into their love. The Holy Ghost, like the Son, has the divine nature as a gift received. He is in every way equal to the two Persons from whom He proceeds by way of love.

The Changeless God

Of course, God cannot change. You must not imagine that He became a Father sometime after He began to exist. It is by the very act of being God that the Father generates the Son and that the Father and the Son breathe the Holy Ghost.

God has no past and no future, only an eternal present. Human language is so limited that there are no words to express just what I want to write for you. If I use the past tense, you may think I am telling you about an act that has already been finished. If I use the present tense, you may think of an action

still going on and therefore incomplete. (God the Son, wrote Berulle, is the rising that is ever at midday. Ever blossoming forth, He is ever the full radiance of divine power.)

That is why greater men than I have coined words to tell people what they mean. Such words are big, but you must not be frightened by them. For example, *circumin**c**ession* (with a “c” in the middle) means that God’s Three Persons are in One Another through the flow of vital activity.

*Circumin**s**ession* (with an “s” in the middle) means that they dwell within One Another in complete repose.

None of the Three Persons may stand without the others. They are in One Another. The Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father; the Son and the Father are in the Holy Ghost and the Holy Ghost is in the Father and the Son. There is only one divine essence common to all three Persons. That is a truth of Faith defined by the Council of Florence, 1438-1445.

Remember how Our Lord speaks of His being in the Father and the Father being in Him (John 10:38; 17:21).

The Basic Law

Having persevered this far, you must be certain that the Three Persons in God are absolutely equal because each of them is infinite.

Nevertheless, if you are thinking hard, you may think you have detected a flaw in the argument. You may be asking yourself, “If the Father has generated the Son?” Also, “if the Father and the Son have really breathed forth the Holy Ghost, have they not something He has not, namely that they have breathed Him forth?” You might also ask, “Surely, the Son must be less than the Father just because He does not generate as the Father does, and the Holy Ghost must be less than the Father and the Son because He does not breathe forth another Person as they do.”

Please do not be disappointed when I tell you there is no complete answer to such questions. If there were, we would understand God's inner life fully and the finite would fully contain the infinite and the Blessed Trinity would no longer be a mystery.

That does not mean that we cannot help ourselves to understand a little more. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost have one and the same divine nature; therefore, they have all the same infinite knowledge. That knowledge generates the Word, in the way we have already seen. God's nature is already wholly expressed as knowledge. It is not separate knowledge in the Father that begets the Son but the same infinite knowledge that is possessed by all three Persons and is equal to the one divine nature.

You can approach the problem of the breathing forth of the Holy Ghost in exactly the same way. The Third Person does not breathe a state of Lovingness because God's nature is wholly expressed as love.

Neither the Father, the Son, nor Holy Ghost has anything the others have not. The whole Godhead is possessed by Each in His own way. In what is the distinction of Persons? Saint Anselm, who was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1093 to 1109, first expressed this in what the theologians call the basic trinitarian law. That law states that in God all is one except for the opposition of relations. The Council of Florence defined it as of Faith.

Sharing the Divine Nature

Is all you have read so far in this little book of any practical value? Of course it is. Knowledge of God is never useless—least of all knowledge of His own inner life. Moreover, our faith as Christians is centered in the Incarnation, the doctrine that God's Second Person took a body and soul like ours and died to redeem all men.

We have been writing about the divine nature. Something Saint Peter wrote in his second Epistle brings it right home to us with rather a shock. Writing of his Master, Christ, the Prince of the Apostles said, "See how all the gifts that make for life and holiness in us belong to His divine power; come to us

through fuller knowledge of Him, whose own glory and sovereignty have drawn us to Himself! Through Him, God has bestowed on us high and treasured promises; *you are to share the divine nature*, with the world's corruption, the world's passions, left behind. And you too have to contribute every effort on your part" (2 Pet. 1:3-5).

Note that breath-taking, stupendous phrase—"You are to share the divine nature." We, poor human beings, are in some mysterious way to share in that essential, necessary principle in God by which the Son proceeds from the Father and the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son.

One of the finest pieces of popular theological writing it has ever been my privilege to read is the description by John Henry Newman of God's life throughout eternity. Here it is:

"God had lived in an eternity before He began to create anything. There was a state of things in which God was by Himself and nothing else but He.

"There was no earth, no sky, no sun, no stars, no space, no time, no beings of any kind; no men, no angels, no seraphim. His throne was without ministers. He was not waited on by any. All was silence. All was repose. There was nothing but God and this state continued, not just for a while but for a measureless duration. It was a state that had ever been. It was the rule of things, and creation was an innovation upon it.

"Creation is, comparatively speaking, of yesterday; it has lasted a poor six thousand years, say sixty thousand, if you will, or six million, or sixty million; what is this to eternity? It is nothing at all. Not so much as a drop compared to the whole ocean, or a grain of sand to the whole earth.

"I say, through a whole eternity, God was by Himself, with no other being but Himself; with nothing external to Himself, not working, but at rest, not speaking nor receiving homage from any, not glorified in creatures, but blessed in Himself and by Himself and wanting nothing."

We have already seen that, in that endless timeless eternity, God was infinite in His activity. He rejoiced in the knowledge of Himself and in knowing

Himself. The infinite Word, His only-begotten Son, is the declaration and expression of that infinite knowledge. Similarly, infinite Lovingness, the Holy Ghost, is the breathing forth of the infinite love of Father and Son.

Within Himself, therefore, God is essentially and eternally active. It is His nature to be active. From His creation, we learn something of His attributes and perfections. The perfection of activity transcends them all. We know of its existence only because He has seen fit to tell us of it. It is the expression of His inmost life. Penetrate to the source of this activity and you have, in an inadequate human way, penetrated to the divine nature itself.

We are Born Again

Come back to Saint Peter's wonderful phrase, "*You are to share the divine nature.*" How can a man possibly share in the very source of the divine Processions by which God Is Three in One? How can the creature share in the source of that infinite activity that is God's throughout eternity? How can humanity share in that by which Divinity knows and loves Himself?

It happens when we are baptized. A new life comes to us. We are born again. "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

What do those two words "born again" mean? One can be born only to life. Therefore, those words mean that through water and the Holy Ghost (that is, through Baptism) Christians are to receive a new life; that is, we are to be given a level of existence we did not possess before.

Try to understand this business of levels of existence. It is not hard. On the lowest level are the things that do not live. Above them are plants, above them unreasoning animals, above them reasoning animals called men, above them angels and above the angels there is God.

Suppose you go out for a walk into the country one Sunday afternoon. You come to a five-barred gate over which a lovely grey mare is sticking out her head. Her nose is pleading to be patted. You yield to the temptation, put out your hand, and pat the mare on the nose. How astonished you would be if

the grey mare then said, “Thank you very much; it was itching just there!” If such an extraordinary thing did happen, you might well conclude that the mare could reason, because she could connect the removal of an itch with being patted and could put the connection into words and thank you for it. A reasoning horse must, of course, have a reasoning nature and that would certainly be a nature higher than a horsey nature. It would, in fact, be a *super* nature. The life by which a horse acted as a man would be a supernatural life. Such a horse might, indeed, be said to share in human nature.

The new life Christians receive at Baptism is precisely a *super* nature: the theology books call it supernatural life or sanctifying grace. (Grace comes from the Latin word, *gratia*, meaning a favor. Supernatural life is called grace because we have no right whatever to it; it is a favor from God.)

If men were raised by the new life we receive at baptism to share in the nature of the angels, we would possess supernatural life; but that is not what God has done for us. He raised us above the angels to share in His own inner life. This new life is given to us as a seed. When a seed is put into the ground, it draws nourishment from the soil and eventually it may grow into a beautiful flower or a mighty tree. So, with our supernatural life. If we nourish it with the supernatural food we receive through the Sacraments and do not kill it by grievous sin, it will burst forth after death into the perfect flower of the vision of God. Sanctifying grace, the seed of life, gives the soul new aptitudes, new capacity. They do not belong to the soul because it is a human soul. They really belong to God. This new capacity permits the soul to share in the intimacy between the three Persons in the Godhead. The soul has, in truth, been born again. It is a new creature with new life.

Nature and Supernature

This contrast between nature and supernature is stressed by Saint Paul. No less than 164 times he uses the phrase “In Christ Jesus.” Supernatural life, the life of God Himself, comes through Baptism, which makes us members of the Church. We say exactly the same thing in another way when we speak of baptism as incorporating us into Christ, that is, into Christ’s Mystical

Body, which is His Church. It is a vital union (like that to which Our Lord alluded after the Last Supper between the vine and the branches). It makes us live and think and will and feel and act with Christ. The source of this new supernatural conduct is supernatural life, sharing in the divine nature, organic union with Christ, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity.

The baptized Christian receives a new personality. Saint Paul calls it “the spirit.” In the passage that follows, he contrasts it with nature, flesh and blood. Man descended from Adam is natural man; man vitalized by grace is supernatural man. There is only one divine life. Sometimes it is called the life of the Spirit and sometimes life in Christ. Christ is Head of the Mystical Body; the Holy Ghost is its soul. “Nature has no longer any claim upon us,” writes the great Apostle, “that we should live a life of nature. If you live a life of nature, you are marked out for death. If you mortify the ways of nature through the power of the Spirit, you will have life. Those who follow the leading of God’s Spirit are all God’s sons. The spirit you have now received is not, as of old, a spirit of slavery, to govern you by fear. The spirit you have now received is the spirit of adoption that makes us cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself thus assures our spirit that we are children of God and, if we are His children, then we are His heirs too—heirs of God, sharing the inheritance of Christ” (Rom. 8:12-17).

We are God’s adopted sons. God has taken us to Himself as Sons and given us a right to the divine inheritance. “See how the Father has shown His love towards us that we should be counted as God’s sons, should be His sons,” wrote Saint John (1 John 3:1).

We must not let the title *adopted* sons mislead us. Amongst us, a child may be legally adopted by a husband and wife who, perhaps, have no children of their own. By law, the adopted child is their child; he is a member of their family, sharing their inheritance. But no form of law can give that child a share in the life of its adopted parents’ bodies and souls. Divine adoption, on the other hand, does enable us to share in the very life of God Himself. “If a man is born of God,” says Saint John, “he does not live sinfully, he is true to

his parentage” (1 John 3:9). This last phrase really means, “the seed of God persists in him” or, as Monsignor Knox expresses in a note, “being a child of God, he inherits a strain proper to his ancestry.”

By grace, therefore, we receive capacity to live in a way resembling God’s life. Further, this seed in us, God’s seed, gives us a kind of birthright to God’s inheritance. Saint John has it in the first chapter of his Gospel—“All those who did welcome Him, He empowered to become the children of God” (John 1:12). The same idea is repeated many times in the New Testament.

Temples of the Trinity

We are still only on the fringe of understanding the soul’s relationship with the Blessed Trinity. Saint Paul touched upon another important point—“Do you not understand that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit has His dwelling in you?” he wrote to the Corinthians (I Cor. 3:16). He was repeating what Our Lord had said after His Last Supper—“If a man has any love for me, he will be true to my word; and then he will win my Father’s love, and we will both come to him, and make our continual abode with him” (John 14:23).

God’s living within the soul in grace is another aspect of our kinship with the Holy Trinity. Grace gives our souls a power of reaction that makes them capable of possessing God, of holding him vitally, of having Him as their own. He dwells there as in a temple.

The blessed in heaven possess God. They have not only an idea of God; they have God Himself. He is in their souls; they have taken hold of Him.

Without supernatural life, we can have an idea of God but we cannot possess Him. Grace enables us to know and love God in such a way that He is within us as an idea is within us when we know ordinary things. Notice, He is actually within us, not merely an *idea* of Him. It is He whom we know through Faith, He whom we love through Charity. He takes the place of any idea we have formed of Him.

Sharing in the divine nature implies that God pours the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity into our souls. These proceed from sanctifying grace much as warmth and light come from the sun. “The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom we have received,” says Saint Paul (Rom. 5:5).

What a wonderful conclusion we must now draw from all this! The soul in grace knows God and loves God with the same knowledge and love, though not in the same way or with the same intensity, with which it will know Him and love Him eternally in heaven. As Saint Paul puts it, “At present, we are looking at a confused reflection in a mirror. Then, we shall see face to face. Now, I have only glimpses of knowledge. Then, I shall recognize God as He has recognized me” (1 Cor. 13:12).

“He that is Mighty hath Done Great Things to Me”

Dare we say now that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is of no practical value to us? Not only has God made us to His own image and likeness in that we are spirits and immortal, destined to live with the Holy Trinity for a timeless eternity, He has enriched us with this wonderful super nature. That super nature gives us powers and capacities far beyond those that are natural to us, so—in some mysterious way—we can share in the nature of God and truly be His children, the brethren of His only-begotten Son, and temples of the Blessed Trinity.

Compare these things, if you like, with the thoughts of natural greatness that so often thrill men’s minds. Think of the fathomless oceans that conceal whole worlds within their depths, of the great mountains, whose snow-capped peaks few men can scale, of the mighty rivers whose power has never been compassed, of the world of stars and planets whose mysteries have not yet been exhausted, of the thunder and the lightning and the storm-tossed sea—think of them all and add to them the unsuspected wonders of science to be revealed during the ages that may be coming. What are they compared with the dignity of a Christian in the state of grace?

He is greater than all of them together. They are God's creatures. He is God's child, God's temple, a sharer in God's life. When they shall all have disappeared; when the sun shall have seemed to have dragged its weary course across the skies for the last time; when the oceans and the rivers, the planets and the stars, the thunder and the lightning, and all the discoveries of men shall be as if they never existed—then the Christian who has died with the Blessed Trinity in his soul shall be still young, and looking forward to an eternity of life possessed of the direct vision of the Triune God.

Such realities impose a grave responsibility upon us. Since we have been raised by God to this new supernatural level, sharing in the nature of the Blessed Trinity, it is a matter of duty to try to live at that level. Our conduct should correspond to what we are.

God has not forgotten to cater for this, too. The Holy Trinity is working with us, teaching us how to live as sons of God. Catholic life is not just the following out of a program—going to Mass on Sunday, receiving the Sacraments, keeping the Commandments, and so on. It is more. It is the loving service of an infinitely good, wise, loving and all-powerful Father by children upon whom He has lavished untold benefits and blessings. In addition, God pursues us through life with his actual graces and helps on the level of our supernature, to sanctify and save our souls.

Devotion to the Trinity

We must never cease to adore the Blessed Trinity. The first duty of religion is to worship God. Adoration is the highest form of prayer. All that we have learned about God's inner life and our sharing in it should force us to our knees saying frequently, "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost." We should not forget the injunction of Saint Paul—"Glorify and bear God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:20).

Made as we are to the image of the Trinity and baptized in the name of the Trinity, we should imitate the Trinity by trying to know God more in order to love Him. "Who will give me wings like a dove and I will fly and be at rest," sang the Psalmist. The two wings that raise us above earthly things and take

us to the heart of the divine goodness are the knowledge and love of God. We show our love by imitating God's perfection as far as we can. Our Lord says, "Be you perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

We should often recall the prayer of Christ in which He appealed to the unity of the Godhead and we should pray for unity amongst men, especially in the one Church of God (John 17:21-22).

We should meditate on the words of Saint John and try to live up to their lesson. "Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. God is love, and who so abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him" (1 John 1:3 and 4:16).

With Our Lord, we should say always of God the Father, "I honor my Father." We do this by praising and thanking Him, loving Him, conforming ourselves to His will and by always seeking His glory.

We are the brethren of Christ, the Second Person. We should see him and worship Him in the Church, in the Holy Eucharist, and in our fellow men. We should try to live up to our dignity.

We are temples of the Holy Ghost. Therefore, we should pray to God who lives within us, appeal to Him to ward off temptation, keep ourselves pure for His sake, and love others because He loves them sufficiently to live or wish to live within them always.

When God acts upon the universe that He created, the three divine Persons act as one principle. Indeed, creation itself and all God's work is done by the Blessed Trinity. One Person does not act as distinct from the others.

Yet, Scripture and the Liturgy refer to the Father as Creator, the Son as Redeemer, and the Holy Ghost as Sanctifier. It is clear that Redemption, as the work of God-made-Man, belongs to the Son alone, for He alone took a human nature. Creation and sanctification are the work of the Trinity because they are operations in the divine nature. They belong to no single Person alone.

We are merely following Our Lord's example when we attribute an external operation to the Person to whom belongs the corresponding operation within

the Godhead. This is called *Appropriation*. To the Father are appropriated works of beginning and power, to the Son (who subsists by way of knowledge) works of wisdom, and to the Holy Ghost (who subsists as love) works of love. Appropriation is useful because it emphasizes that the three divine Persons in God are actually distinct and not only a form of words. Appropriation also emphasizes that, in the inner life, the Godhead, the Father is Beginning, the Son is Wisdom, and the Holy Ghost is Love.

The Sign of the Cross

Make the Sign of the Cross saying:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

This sacred sign may be regarded as a compendium of all the mysteries of our Faith, as an homage rendered to the three Persons of the adorable Trinity, as an act of gratitude for all that the Godhead—The Father the Son, and the Holy Spirit—had condescended to do in favor of man.

Indulgence of 100 days, each time.

Indulgence of 300 days if made with holy water.

Pius IX, March 23, 1866; S. P. Ap., February 10, 1935.



“Trinity,” oil on canvas by Austrian artist Franz Anton Maulbertsch (1724 – 1796), one of the most renowned exponents of rococo painting in the German region. The original can be seen at the Museum of Fine Art in Budapest. This is a faithful photographic reproduction of an original one-dimensional work of art.*



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